

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 1

Eighteen Things We Could Do

Summary

- 1. Choosing and planning how to learn**
– issues of what, why, when and how

We are given descriptions of learning activities we could engage in. We discuss each in turn, noting the possible advantages and disadvantages, and modify them, if we wish, to make them more realistic, enjoyable and relevant for ourselves. We then prioritize them, choosing the three that sound most valuable. We give reasons for our choices and decisions and these are written as a set of criteria for evaluating real activities we engage in. A possible development, of course, is for some of the activities then to be made real, not just stay imaginary.

Identity and Belonging

- 2. Who, what and where are we?**
– thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears

We answer various kinds of questionnaire about our personal interests, and in this way reflect on our own identities and personal qualities. We may then administer the same or similar questionnaires to others as part of a survey, and present a report on our findings in writing, or through PowerPoint, an interactive website, collages, an e-zine, or video diaries.

- 3. Young Muslims in Britain**
– differences, contrasts and things in common

We are given extracts from interviews with young British Muslims. We select those which are closest to our own feelings and thoughts and imagine ourselves contacting the people concerned, for example through FaceBook. In our messages we make similar remarks ourselves. Also we write to some of the people from whom we feel different. We may then develop our messages into video diaries or other kinds of self-portrait.

- 4. Not easy being British**
– a citizenship test and points arising

Working in small groups, we answer questions of the kind that are asked in citizenship tests. How relevant do we consider the questions to be? If a question appears irrelevant can we nevertheless guess why it was asked? What suggestions do we have for questions that are more relevant? More specifically, can we come up with questions which are more appropriate for people like us? We then go on to discuss concepts of Britishness and national identity and to compare our own views with those of others.

5. Islam in Britain and the world – facts, dates and numbers

We work with a quiz concerning Muslims in Britain and the world. We draw on our general knowledge and on guesswork, and also perhaps research the answers on the Internet and in works of reference. We construct a similar quiz for ourselves and each other. We may conduct a survey to find out the levels of knowledge amongst others, and may depict some of the correct answers in charts, graphs and diagrams.

Stories, Incidents and Experiences

6. What should I say, what should I do? – scenarios, situations and sorting things out

We discuss real or imagined incidents where there is uncertainty about what should happen next. We write letters or messages to a helpline, blog or agony column, and discuss and draft possible responses. Also, we consider where we ourselves would turn for advice, guidance and assistance on matters such as those raised by the stories. We evaluate the real answers given on similar topics in Muslim magazines or on Muslim websites.

7. Living and learning – interviews, biography and oral history

We are given about six short extracts from biographical writings by or about British Muslims, and draw up lists of questions we would like to ask if we had the opportunity to meet the people who are featured in the writings. We then convert these into real interview schedules and use the schedules to interview certain individuals. We may then write similar pieces ourselves, or create video diaries.

8. Support and guidance – role-models and signposts from tradition

We are told, and re-tell, stories from the early years of Islam, dwelling in particular on events where the Prophet or one of his companions acted as a role-model. We apply the stories and their teachings to everyday life in modern Britain.

9. Fool, trickster, rogue or sage? – the ways and words of Mullah Nasruddin

We read or enact a number of Mullah Nasruddin stories, and re-tell some of them using modern contexts and references. Which stories show a foolish or ignorant person, which show a trickster, which a rogue, which a wise person? Do some show all four? Can we summarize the teachings in the stories with pithy sayings of our own devising?

Rights and Responsibilities

10. The language of rights – declarations and charters over the centuries

We work in the first instance with an imaginary scenario about a journey through space to another planet and we draft and re-draft charters or declarations of rights. We then look at quotations from historic declarations – the Covenant of Madina, for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and a recent statement from Northern Ireland. In the light of these we amend and add to the charters drafted by ourselves.

11. Human rights and human wrongs – messages and campaigns

We engage in a campaign, either as an exercise or (preferably) for real, for the protection of human rights worldwide. We start by viewing a recent film produced by Amnesty International about injustices surrounding Guantanamo Bay. We may continue with specific cases which we research through the Amnesty website, or else with cases presented on the website of Cageprisoners. We may write letters to key figures, including our own MPs and ministers, and engage in fund-raising and publicity.

12. Supporting and assisting people in need – a funding committee decides

We are given, or we ourselves raise, a sum of money. Alternatively, we use imaginary money. We are also given descriptions of a range of charitable projects and decide how to allocate our real or imaginary money between them. More elaborately we can role-play the discussions, with different individuals or groups taking on different advocacy roles. Instead or as well, we make visits to, or receive visits from, real projects.

13. Making democracy work – telling, speaking, asking, lobbying

We look at a selection of today's national newspapers, either the print editions or those online, or this week's local papers; or at the most recently published statement of the central government's legislative intentions ('the Queen's Speech'); or at the legislative intentions of the Scottish Parliament or Welsh Assembly. We discuss these and decide which of the issues we would like to influence, if we possibly can. We learn how to write letters, faxes or email messages to our own elected representatives; send various messages; and keep a record of the answers we receive.

14. Every Muslim child matters – needs and rights in mainstream schools

We are given a set of statements that could feature in a report by inspectors about a mainstream secondary school in Britain, or in a school's self-assessment form (SEF). We add to the list and then use it to evaluate the mainstream schools we know best. We may then proceed to write letters to the school's board of governors, and may propose a debate about the issues at a forthcoming meeting of the School Council.

News, Views and Commentary

15. Items in today's news – critical questions to ask

We are given a list of questions to ask about a news story on TV or in a paper, and use these with regard to a specific cutting, or item on a website, or clip of film. On the basis of our analysis, we draft an imaginary letter to the editor or to Press Complaints Commission. If the item is recent, we write such letters for real.

16. Us and them, or in this together? – 'Islam' and 'the West'

We consider some news stories about Islam in Britain and Islam in the world, and whether the stories show the West and Islam as locked in inevitable conflict (a 'clash of civilizations') or whether on the contrary there can be partnership and cooperation. On the basis of our reflections and conclusions we write real or imaginary letters to the local and national media, and to local and national councillors and MPs.

17. Who and what's out there? – blogs and websites

We visit a number of blogs and websites, and say what we like and dislike about them. Also, we create scrapbooks with extracts from them and perhaps posters and wallcharts as well. Further, we write and submit comments. We may in addition create a blog on which we post our own reflections about things which are currently happening.

18. A way to get the attention of youth? – Muslim Hip Hop and points arising

We listen to various Muslim rappers and visit their websites, and look at some of the debates that have taken place, and continue to take place, within Muslim communities about whether Islam and Hip Hop music are compatible with each other. If our judgement is that there is no inherent incompatibility, we compose, perform and record our own work. And if we judge they are incompatible, we will present reasoned argument for the judgement, either in speech or writing.

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